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ABSTRACT

Studies examining life in the Indiana University residence halls from an ecosystem perspective have been conducted annually since 1978 to ascertain how students evaluate a series of issues related to residential living. The 1985 study, the eighth in a series, involved a representative sample of 824 students drawn from the residence centers. The instrument used was similar to one used with previous assessment projects. A Likert scale was used for the forced-choice items. After completing the questionnaire, students were asked to go back over the questionnaire and identify up to five items about which they felt strongly. The questionnaire examined satisfaction with programming, residence hall staff, student government, student publications, study conditions, and food services. Responses for residence hall programs, residence hall staff, student government, publications, and food service were strongly positive. Study conditions were rated as mildly positive. Students seemed basically satisfied with their environment. (Five data tables are included, one comparing the results of the 1985 study with those from previous years. A copy of the questionnaire is appended.) (ABL)

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AN EVALUATION OF LIFE IN THE RESIDENCE HALLS AT INDIANA UNIVERSITY FROM AN ECOSYSTEM PERSPECTIVE: 1985

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This report is the eighth in a series of studies that have examined life in the Indiana University residence halls using an ecosystem perspective. Studies have been conducted each Fall since 1978 to ascertain how students evaluate a series of issues related to residential living, including such matters as residence hall programs, staff responsiveness to student needs, student government, printed material and information, study conditions and order, and food service. This information is helpful in determining how students perceive the environment of the residence halls and it is useful in generating suggestions and recommendations from students as to how to improve their environment.

The ecosystem approach to environmental assessment asks students to respond to a series of forced-choice items and it also asks students to identify issues about which they feel very strongly, in either a positive or negative sense. Students are asked to recommend steps that the university might take to enhance an already positive situation or rectify an unsatisfactory situation. Individual community councils and university officials in the various residence halls will address the results for the residence centers and make changes. As is the case with any study of perceptions, the results of the study can be affected by uncontrolled intervening variables (eg. a very positive or very negative incident receiving widespread publicity). To the best knowledge of the researchers, no such intervening variables affected this study.

The report presents an overview of life in the undergraduate residence halls. Further information is available upon request for the graduate living area. This paper will report the results of the study conducted in 1985. It will also contrast the results of the 1985 study with the results of the studies conducted from 1978 through 1984.

Method

Sampling

The sample for this project wasdrawn on a systematic basis. Each center,

with the exception of Collins Living Learning Center, drew a sample of 100 student participants. Due to its smaller size, 50 Collins residents were included in the sample. The students chosen to participate were identified by use of a roster of student residents. The total population of each center (except Collins) was divided by 100. The resulting quotient was the number used to identify students included in the sample. For example, in a center of 1100 students, the resulting quotient was 11. Thus, every 11th student listed on the roster was included in the sample. While this sampling method is not random, it was considered to be reasonably representative, since each living unit had a minimum of one student included in the sample. In nearly all cases, several students from each living unit were included in the sample.

Instrumentation

The instrument used in this project was developed by the authors. It was based on the one that had been employed in previous assessment projects at Indiana University. Representatives from the Halls of Residence Department and the Residence Halls Association were invited to submit items for inclusion in the questionnaire, and they did so. Additionally, the community councils of the various residence centers were asked to submit not more than five items that addressed specific concerns of individual centers. The results to those items are not included in this study. Many of the centers submitted special questions, which often concerned such matters as programs unique to the centers or library usage. For the forced-choice items, a seven point Likert-type scale was used (7=very strongly agree, 1=very strongly disagree). A unique feature of the instrument was the environmental referrent section. This section gave students the opportunity to go back through the questionnaire and identify not more than five items they felt very strongly about, in a positive or negative sense. They were asked to describe why they felt strongly about the items and then to indicate how the issues addressed in the items could be enhanced. This method encourages

students to become directly involved in the process of redesigning their environment to better meet their needs. A copy of the questionnaire is included as Appendix A.

Data Collection

The questionnaires were distributed to the potential respondents through the resident assistant staff. The potential respondents were asked to complete the questionnaire and return them to a designated place in the center. Data were collected during the week of October 28 - November 1, 1985. One follow-up data collection was conducted from November 4-8.

Data Analysis

Complete reports of the results were prepared using SPSS computer programs which yielded frequency distributions, modes, means, medians and histograms for each center as well as for the residence hall system. Means, medians and modes were computed for sub-groups within each center's sample along the following lines: the unit within which the students lived; their class standing; their sex; and whether or not they had lived in their present residence center prior to Fall, 1985. These additional data are especially useful in determining the impact of residential life for specific groups of students, such as sophomore women, freshmen men, or students who have lived in the residence hall in previous years.

Results

Of the 950 students included in the sample, 824 completed the questionnaire, for a response rate of 86.7%. Reflecting the general residence hall population, the largest group of respondents by class was freshmen, followed by sophomores, juniors and seniors. A summary of the class standing of the respondents is listed in Table 1.

Table 1

Class Standing of Respondents

Class Standing	Number of Respondents	Percentage of Respondents
Freshman	437	53.0
Sophomore	232	28.2
Junior	92	11.2
Senior	47	5.7
Graduate	2	.2
No response	14	1.7
Total	824	100.0

More women than men participated in this study, which reflects the fact that more women than men live in the residence halls. Over 58% of the participants were women, while the balance were men. The sex of the respondents is reported in Table 2.

Table 2

Sex of Respondents

Sex	Number of Respondents	Percentage of Respondents
Female	480	58.3
Male	322	39.1
No response	22	2.7
Total	824	100.1*

*Does not equal 100% due to rounding

The largest percentage of respondents reported that they were living in their present residence hall for the first semester. Over 65% indicated that they were living in their residence center for the first semester, while the balance,

excluding the non-respondents, had lived in the hall previously. A summary of these results are listed in Table 3.

Table 3

First Semester Lived in the Present Residence Center

Response	Number of Respondents	Percentage of Respondents
Yes	538	65.3
No	268	32.5
No response	18	2.2
Total	824	100.0

Means, medians and standard deviations for each individual item are listed in Table 4. Nearly all the items elicited a mean score ranging from 4.00 to 6.00. One item, which dealt with food service, had a mean score below 4.00.

The results of the 1985 study are compared with those from previous years in Table 5. Four items had the highest mean score for the eight years the study has been conducted. One item (having an opportunity to study in an alternative place in the residence center) had the lowest mean score over the years of the study.

Discussion

This section will present an analysis of the results according to the following categories: programs, staff, student government, information and printed matter, order, and food service.

Residence Hall Programs

Programming issues included such items as satisfaction with social programs, guest speakers, recreational programs, cultural programs, faculty involvement, and health and wellness programs. The items which examined student responses

to social programming in the unit (5.21) as well as the center (5.25) elicited favorable responses. The items which covered student satisfaction with opportunities to meet faculty and hear guest speakers received the most favorable response from students over the past eight years. Recreational programming was evaluated very favorably (5.45) while programs offered by health and wellness education, received a moderately favorable response (4.40). Educational programs in general received a mean score of 4.70 from the respondents.

Residence Hall Staff

Resident Assistants and Halls of Residence personnel were evaluated in this group of items. Halls of Residence staff concerned with physical facilities received their highest response ever (4.94), while those who work at the main desk received a very positive response (5.46). Resident assistants were evaluated as being very available to help students (5.77) and very knowledgable about the services and resources available at the university (5.82). Students reported that they know about the special services that Foods Managers can provide, like special diets and social functions (4.23) and they indicated that counter servers are helpful and courteous (4.79).

Student Government

Student government was evaluated according to three dimensions by the student respondents. RHA Student Services, which provides services including bunk bed, refrigerator and fan rental was evaluated positively (5.00). The response of student government to student needs and the opportunities created by student government to participate in leadership positions also were evaluated positively by the students (4.52 and 4.87 respectively).

Information and Printed Materials

Two publications (The Key and The Ins and Outs) were evaluated positively by students. The mean response of the respondents to The Ins and Outs was

positive (5.25) and The Key received a response (4.62) as a document which is a useful resource to students. Other informational items, including students' receiving adequate information describing the services and resources of their center and students knowing where to go to remedy problems were evaluated positively. Informational material received a mean response of 5.12 and students knowing where to go to resolve problems was evaluated at 4.83.

Study Conditions and Order

Several items dealt with student knowledge of policy and general safety, and study conditions. The environment allowing for students to study in their rooms received a response of 4.39. The wording of this item has been changed from previous years which may account for the relatively low score. The opportunity to study in alternative areas of the residence hall received a response of 5.89, the lowest of the life of the study by .02. The modal response for this item, however, was 7.00.

Students reported feeling safe and secure in their residences (5.50), and they indicated that they knew the rules of the residence center (5.67) which was the highest response for that item over the course of this study.

Food Service

Two aspects of the universal meal transfer program were evaluated by students. The first, that aspect of the program which enables students more freedom in choosing a dining hall for meals, received a very positive response from students (5.79). The other aspect of the program, allowing students to participate in more meals, also was evaluated positively, receiving a mean score of 5.01. Obviously, the flexibility of this program is appreciated by students.

Conclusions

Based on the results of this study, several conclusions can be drawn:

1. Residence hall programs and activities were evaluated very positively

by students. Several of the items received the most positive response of the eight years of the study. Faculty involvement with students has improved over the years, perhaps due to an increase in the number of centers offering weekly speakers' programs, and the introduction of additional faculty fellows' programs.

2. Residence hall staff, including a variety of individuals from several departments were evaluated very positively by the respondents. Custodial workers and resident assistants received excellent responses.

3. RHA Student Services appears to provide a well regarded series of services to students. Student government responses to student needs were evaluated positively by students and the respondents reported that they have an opportunity to participate in leadership positions, which is one of the purposes of having a student government.

4. Students indicated that they have adequate information about how to get things done in their residence center, and that the publications the university prepares meets their expressed purposes. The "Ins and Outs" was perceived more positively than "The Key," according to the responses of student participants.

5. The floor environment contributing to study activity was examined for the first time this year, and the responses were barely positive. Students reported, however, that they knew where alternative areas for study are located in the residence halls. Students indicated that they feel safe and secure in the residence centers.

6. Responses to the universal meal ticket program were very popular. The median response to the item concerning the meal program allowing for more freedom was the highest in the entire study. An additional statistic has been added to this year's report. Modal responses for each item have been included, and for a number of items, the mode was 7.00. The mode never fell below 4.00 for any of the items. This additional information will help the reader draw conclusions about how students perceived their living environment.

The students who participated in this study seemed relatively pleased with their living experience and environment. While some aspects of the environment could stand improvement, much of residence hall life appears to be more than satisfactory. The results of this project will provide a blueprint for intervention and activities for the balance of this academic year.

Table 4

Item by Item Responses

Item	Mean	Mode	Median	Standard Deviation
1. The Ins and Outs (the student handbook), provides an adequate description of services, resources and regulations to students on campus.	5.25	6.00	5.40	1.23
2. There are adequate opportunities for social activities in my living unit (house, floor).	5.21	6.00	5.46	1.48
3. I am satisfied with the opportunities I have to hear guest speakers in my center.	4.51	4.00	4.35	1.51
4. The Halls of Residence staff are responsive to my needs concerning physical facilities.	4.94	6.00	5.06	1.48
5. My floor environment allows me to study in my room.	4.39	6.00	4.67	1.85
6. My resident assistant has been available when I have needed him or her.	5.77	7.00	6.14	1.45
7. The Halls of Residence Office staff are responsive and helpful in providing main desk services.	5.46	6.00	5.71	1.36
8. Student government in my residence center offers me opportunities to participate in leadership positions.	4.87	4.00	4.75	1.41
9. I am satisfied with the opportunities I have to meet with faculty members in my residence center (outside of class).	4.27	4.00	4.17	1.49
10. My student government responds adequately to the needs expressed by residents of this center.	4.52	4.00	4.41	1.42
11. I have adequate opportunities to participate in recreational activities in my residence center.	5.45	6.00	5.69	1.92
12. I know the behavioral expectations of my residence center.	5.67	6.00	5.94	1.35

Table 4 Con'd.

Item by Item Responses

Item	Mean	Mode	Median	Standard Deviation
13. There are adequate opportunities for cultural events in my center, i.e., music, arts, crafts.	4.28	4.00	4.22	1.53
14. Opportunities exist to talk with someone in my center about personal concerns, such as homesickness or relationships.	4.79	4.00	4.81	1.66
15. There are adequate opportunities for social activities in my center.	5.25	6.00	5.46	1.47
16. The Key (Guide to Graduate Living in Eigenmann Center) is an adequate resource to me as a student living in a residence hall.	4.62	4.00	4.36	1.30
17. The custodian in my living unit keeps the area clean.	5.82	7.00	6.36	1.75
18. I have an opportunity to study in alternative areas of the residence center, such as libraries or study halls.	5.89	7.00	6.20	1.36
19. I have adequate information about the services and resources available in my center.	5.12	6.00	5.31	1.42
20. I feel safe and secure in my residence center.	5.50	7.00	5.91	1.61
21. The counter servers in my dining hall are helpful and courteous.	4.79	5.00	5.06	1.74
22. I look forward to meal time in my dining hall.	3.52	4.00	3.60	1.84
23. When I have a problem in my center, I am aware of the person(s) to contact to help with the situation.	4.83	5.00	4.94	1.51
24. The Universal Meal Transfer system enables me to have more freedom in choosing a dining room for my meals.	5.79	7.00	6.22	1.45
25. There are adequate educational programs available in my center.	4.70	4.00	4.50	1.32

Table 4 Con'd.

Item by Item Responses

Item	Mean	Mode	Median	Standard Deviation
26. I am aware of the help my Foods Manager can provide in planning social functions for residents as well as special diets and sick trays.	4.23	4.00	4.29	1.69
27. My RA is knowledgable about the services and resources available at IU.	5.82	7.00	6.15	1.37
28. I believe the health-related programs presented in the residence halls by Health and Wellness Education add to my overall educational experience.	4.40	4.00	4.25	1.32
29. The Universal Meal Transfer system has enabled me to participate in more meals because of the convenience of eating in any dining hall.	5.01	4.00	5.01	1.60
30. I am satisfied with the services of RHA Student Services, like bunk beds, refrigerators, and fans.	5.00	4.00	5.12	1.55

Table 5

Mean Scores for the 1978, 1979, 1980, 1981, 1982, 1983, 1984 and 1985 Surveys

Item	$\bar{X}$ Fall 1978	$\bar{X}$ Fall 1979	$\bar{X}$ Fall 1980	$\bar{X}$ Fall 1981	$\bar{X}$ Fall 1982	$\bar{X}$ Fall 1983	$\bar{X}$ Fall 1984	$\bar{X}$ Fall 1985
1. The "Ins and Outs," distributed at registration, provides an adequate description of services and resources to students on campus.	*	5.03	5.04	5.17	5.13	5.12	5.394	5.25
2. There are adequate opportunities for social activities in my living unit (house, floor, hall).	4.92	5.16	5.24	5.21	4.96	5.15	5.314	5.21
3. Interesting, informative guest speakers make presentations in my center.	2.30	3.04	3.22	3.71	3.97	4.32	4.396	4.51
4. The Halls of Residence staff are responsive to my needs concerning physical facilties.	4.59	4.52	4.80	4.85	4.74	4.67	4.907	4.94
5. The Halls of Residence Office staff are responsive and helpful in providing main desk services.	6.02	5.26	5.31	5.15	5.20	5.19	5.30	5.46
6. I am able to study in my room when I wish to.	4.20	4.46	4.53	4.61	4.45	4.54	4.574	4.39
7. The resident assistants (resident fellows in Collins) in my center are available to meet my needs.	5.19	5.62	5.53	5.80	5.66	5.68	5.780	5.77
8. I have adequate opportunities to participate in recreational programs offered through my residence center.	5.33	5.66	5.55	5.40	5.35	5.59	5.501	5.45

Table 5 Con'd.

Mean Scores for the 1978, 1979, 1980, 1981, 1982, 1983, 1984 and 1985 Surveys

Item	$\bar{X}$ Fall 1978	$\bar{X}$ Fall 1979	$\bar{X}$ Fall 1980	$\bar{X}$ Fall 1981	$\bar{X}$ Fall 1982	$\bar{X}$ Fall 1983	$\bar{X}$ Fall 1984	$\bar{X}$ Fall 1985
9. Student government in my residence center offers me opportunities to participate in leadership positions.	4.32	5.08	4.97	4.87	4.77	4.79	4.956	4.87
10. I am satisfied with the opportunities I have to meet with faculty members in my residence center.	3.41	3.90	3.91	4.09	3.91	4.11	4.012	4.27
11. I know the rules of my residence center.	5.19	5.56	5.36	5.42	5.65	5.58	5.593	5.67
12. The opportunity for cultural events in my center, i.e., concerts, arts and crafts, meets my needs.	3.68	3.98	4.24	4.23	4.08	4.25	4.378	4.28
13. I have an opportunity to talk with someone in my center about personal problems, such as homesickness, relationships, or academics.	4.40	4.87	4.98	4.95	4.82	4.70	4.921	4.79
14. I have an opportunity to study in alternative areas of the residence center, such as libraries or study halls.	*	5.92	5.99	5.95	5.98	6.01	6.017	5.89
15. There are adequate opportunities for social activities in my center.	4.81	5.11	5.09	5.09	5.03	5.14	5.317	5.25
16. The Key does a good job of describing residence hall living at Indiana University.	4.68	4.96	4.66	4.37	4.74	4.72	4.52	4.62

Table 5 Con'd.

Mean Scores for the 1978, 1979, 1980, 1981, 1982, 1983, 1984 and 1985 Surveys

Item	$\bar{X}$ Fall 1978	$\bar{X}$ Fall 1979	$\bar{X}$ Fall 1980	$\bar{X}$ Fall 1981	$\bar{X}$ Fall 1982	$\bar{X}$ Fall 1983	$\bar{X}$ Fall 1984	$\bar{X}$ Fall 1985
17. The custodian in my living unit keeps the area clean.	5.51	5.87	5.74	5.79	5.72	5.68	5.882	5.82
18. I have received adequate printed information which describes the services and resources available to students in my center.	4.71	5.12	4.93	5.28	5.10	5.15	5.267	5.12
19. I feel safe and secure in my residence center.	5.30	5.33	5.27	5.58	5.32	5.47	5.586	5.50
20. When I have a problem in my center I am aware of the procedures to follow to remedy the situation.	*	4.54	4.56	4.63	4.90	4.70	4.934	4.83

* Did not appear in the 1978 questionnaire
1 = Very Strongly Disagree
7 = Very Strongly Agree

APPENDIX A

Indiana University

October 31, 1985

Dear Resident Student:

One of the objectives we have is to make living in the residence halls a rewarding experience for students. Students should have a regular opportunity to provide information to organizations such as the Community Councils and the staff assigned to the various centers on how they perceive life in the center.

With that in mind, you have been selected as one of approximately 10% of the residential population to complete the attached questionnaire. It should not take more than 20 minutes to do so. The information you provide will be extremely useful in attempting to modify the environment in which you live.

We want to assure you that all responses will be anonymous. Let us thank you in advance for your cooperation.

Sincerely yours,

Lawrence J. Gaffney, Director
Halls of Residence

Rick Vess, President
Residence Halls Association

John H. Schuh, Director
Department of Residence Life

Please answer the following three questions by placing an X in the blank space that represents the best answer to the question, and then go on to the next page:

Please indicate your class standing:
Freshman ____
Sophomore ____
Junior ____
Senior ____
Graduate ____

Please indicate your sex:
Female ____
Male ____

Is this the first semester you have lived in your present residence center?

Yes ____
No ____

Please indicate your living unit: Center _____ Unit _____

PART I

Listed below are a series of statements. Please read them and on the continuum to the right of each statement, indicate the degree to which you agree or disagree with it by placing an X in the appropriate blank.

The following definitions of terms may be useful to you:

Resident Assistant (Resident Fellow in LLC): This person is an upperclass or graduate student who is assigned to a floor or house and is responsible for interpersonal, social, and academic experiences of students.

Residence Life Staff: Includes Resident Assistants (Resident Fellows) and Residence Life Coordinators.

Halls of Residence Staff: Includes the Housing Manager, custodial and clerical staff.

Food Service Staff: Foods Manager, Assistant Managers, and staff.

Residence Halls Association (RHA): The umbrella organization for student government in all undergraduate residence halls.

Center Student Government: Includes all student government positions in your center, such as BOG, BOVG, Exec. Board.

	Very Strongly Agree (7)						Very Strongly Disagree (1)
1. The Ins and Outs (the student handbook), provides an adequate description of services, resources and regulations to students on campus.	___/	___/	___/	____/	___/	___/	___/
2. There are adequate opportunities for social activities in my living unit (house, floor).	___/	___/	___/	____/	___/	___/	___/
3. I am satisfied with the opportunities I have to hear guest speakers in my center.	___/	___/	___/	____/	___/	___/	___/
4. The Halls of Residence staff are responsive to my needs concerning physical facilities.	___/	___/	___/	____/	___/	___/	___/
5. My floor environment allows me to study in my room.	___/	___/	___/	____/	___/	___/	___/
6. My resident assistant has been available when I have needed him or her.	___/	___/	___/	____/	___/	___/	___/
7. The Halls of Residence Office staff are responsive and helpful in providing main desk services.	___/	___/	___/	____/	___/	___/	___/
8. Student government in my residence center offers me opportunities to participate in leadership positions.	___/	___/	___/	____/	___/	___/	___/
9. I am satisfied with the opportunities I have to meet with faculty members in my residence center (outside of class).	___/	___/	___/	____/	___/	___/	___/
10. My student government responds adequately to the needs expressed by residents of this center.	___/	___/	___/	____/	___/	___/	___/
11. I have adequate opportunities to participate in recreational activities in my residence center.	___/	___/	___/	____/	___/	___/	___/
12. I know the behavioral expectations of my residence center.	___/	___/	___/	____/	___/	___/	___/

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	Very Strongly Agree (7)				Neutral (4)		Very Strongly Disagree (1)
13. There are adequate opportunities for cultural events in my center, i.e., music, arts, crafts.	___/	___/	___/	____/	___/	___/	___/
14. Opportunities exist to talk with someone in my center about personal concerns, such as homesickness or relationships.	___/	___/	___/	____/	___/	___/	___/
15. There are adequate opportunities for social activities in my center.	___/	___/	___/	____/	___/	___/	___/
16. The Key (Guide to Graduate Living in Eigenmann Center) is an adequate resource to me as a student living in a residence hall.	___/	___/	___/	____/	___/	___/	___/
17. The custodian in my living unit keeps the area clean.	___/	___/	___/	____/	___/	___/	___/
18. I have an opportunity to study in alternative areas of the residence center, such as libraries or study halls.	___/	___/	___/	____/	___/	___/	___/
19. I have adequate information about the services and resources available in my center.	___/	___/	___/	____/	___/	___/	___/
20. I feel safe and secure in my residence center.	___/	___/	___/	____/	___/	___/	___/
21. The counter servers in my dining hall are helpful and courteous.	___/	___/	___/	____/	___/	___/	___/
22. I look forward to meal time in my dining hall.	___/	___/	___/	____/	___/	___/	___/
23. When I have a problem in my center, I am aware of the person(s) to contact to help with the situation.	___/	___/	___/	____/	___/	___/	___/
24. The Universal Meal Transfer system enables me to have more freedom in choosing a dining room for my meals.	___/	___/	___/	____/	___/	___/	___/
25. There are adequate educational programs available in my center.	___/	___/	___/	____/	___/	___/	___/
26. I am aware of the help my Foods Manager can provide in planning social functions for residents as well as special diets and sick trays.	___/	___/	___/	____/	___/	___/	___/
27. My RA is knowledgable about the services and resources available at IU.	___/	___/	___/	____/	___/	___/	___/
28. I believe the health-related programs presented in the residence halls by Health and Wellness Education add to my overall educational experience.	___/	___/	___/	____/	___/	___/	___/
29. The Universal Meal Transfer system has enabled me to participate in more meals because of the convenience of eating in any dining hall.	___/	___/	___/	____/	___/	___/	___/
30. I am satisfied with the services of RHA Student Services, like bunk beds, refrigerators, and fans.	___/	___/	___/	____/	___/	___/	___/

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PART II

Now that you have completed Part I, go back through the items and identify not more than five items that you feel very strongly about, in either a positive or negative sense. Write the number of those items in the blocks provided below. Then, next to the item number, write why you feel strongly about the item, and what you would recommend to improve the situation.

ITEM NUMBER	WHY DO YOU FEEL STRONGLY ABOUT THE ITEM	WHAT CAN BE DONE TO IMPROVE THE SITUATION

Thank you for your help with this project.

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